



Exploring themes to improve quality for students

Analysis of the thematic elements of Institutional Review for England and Northern Ireland and Review of College Higher Education:

The First Year Student Experience (2011-13) and Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement (2012-13)

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Executive summary

In September 2011 the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) implemented a new review method for reviewing higher education institutions: Institutional Review for England and Northern Ireland (IRENI). As well as providing judgements about institutions, IRENI included a thematic element. This is intended to produce useful and timely good practice guidance for the higher education sector. Teams looked at the theme during each review and commented on it in the published review report.

The theme for the first year of IRENI (2011-12) was the **First Year Student Experience**. This topic was considered timely, particularly in the context of the proposed new student funding arrangements for England and Northern Ireland. All institutions that underwent review in 2011-12 addressed this theme.

Two themes ran in parallel for Institutional Reviews that took place in England and Northern Ireland in 2012-13. The theme of First Year Student Experience was run alongside the theme **Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement**. This second theme was chosen because if students were to be placed at the heart of the higher education system, they needed to be given opportunities and encouragement to provide feedback on their experiences, and to contribute to changes and improvements. Institutions undergoing review were asked to explore one of these themes after consideration of both with their student representatives. This included those colleges undergoing Review of College Higher Education (RCHE).

Reviewers, informed by the self-evaluation document (SED) and the student written submission (SWS) gained an understanding of the institution's approach to the thematic element through the normal schedule of meetings and through reading of institutional documentation. They commented on the theme in the published report, but did not make a judgement on it.

Forty-eight Institutional Reviews are analysed in this report. The material analysed includes self-evaluation documents, student written submissions, evidence bases and published reports. In addition, the report draws on QAA's [good practice knowledgebase](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/improvinghighereducation/goodpractice)¹ and [recommendations knowledgebase](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/improvinghighereducation/recommendations)² derived from review reports, and on an interim theme analysis based on the IRENI review activity in 2011-12.

Of the 48 institutions, 37 were higher education institutions reviewed through the IRENI method in 2011-12 and 2012-13, while 11 were colleges reviewed through the RCHE method in 2012-13.

The First Year Student Experience was explored in 25 institutions: 15 in 2011-12 (when the theme was compulsory), and 10 in 2012-13, when it was chosen by four of the 22 higher education institutions and six of the 11 colleges.

Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement was chosen in 2012-13 by 18 higher education institutions and five colleges.

1 QAA good practice knowledgebase: www.qaa.ac.uk/improvinghighereducation/goodpractice

2 QAA recommendations knowledgebase: www.qaa.ac.uk/improvinghighereducation/recommendations

Summary of outcomes

First Year Student Experience

The evidence demonstrates that there is sound practice across the UK higher education sector in ensuring that the first year student experience facilitates a smooth and seamless transition into higher education.

There is evidence that, specifically:

- student induction is effectively coordinated and managed across the institution
- best practice in integrating students into the institution is disseminated to staff
- induction programmes are differentiated to meet the needs of particular groups of students
- mentoring schemes are used to support students' transition into higher education
- meaningful information is provided for each stage in the application and transition process
- formative assessment and timely feedback are used to prepare students for the requirements of summative assessment
- there are systems for managing 'at risk' students and for evaluating intervention strategies used to support students.

However, there are a number of areas where it is broadly acknowledged that further development is needed to avoid students becoming demotivated and/or frustrated during their transition into higher education:

- avoid information overload and ensure there is an appropriate balance between generic and course-specific information
- ensure that information is available in a timely manner, especially course-specific information such as timetables and handbooks
- avoid requiring students to produce duplicate information
- ensure feedback on assessment is timely, supportive and developmental.

Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The evidence demonstrates that there is much embedded sound practice across the UK higher education sector in relation to the involvement of students in quality assurance and enhancement.

There is evidence that, specifically:

- systems for student representation, both at course and at higher levels, are almost universal across the UK higher education sector, and some form of associated training is generally provided
- processes for capturing students' opinions, usually via surveys at various levels, are in place (all institutions reviewed)
- most higher education institutions have appointed, or are planning to appoint, student members of periodic review, course approval and course re-approval panels
- many higher education institutions foster good relations between the students' union or other student representative body and the institution, often by means of regular meetings between senior university staff and students' union officers

- schemes for rewarding perceived excellence in teaching, either wholly operated by students or involving a strong element of student involvement, are widespread
- most institutions are aware of the need to extend the concept of student engagement beyond these formal levels, and a range of initiatives are in place across the sector to address this.

However, there are a number of areas where it is broadly acknowledged that further development is needed, principally:

- 'close loops' by informing students what has taken place as a consequence of their representatives' activities
- communicate more with the student body about major initiatives and changes
- ensure consistency of practice between different areas of the institution (departments, schools, and so on) in implementing centrally agreed policies
- engage 'difficult to reach' student groups such as taught postgraduate and research students, distance-learning students and those in off-campus partner institutions
- generate the cultural change needed to ensure that students are recognised as, and treated as, full partners in the process of ensuring and enhancing the quality of their learning experience.

Conclusion

QAA was asked to develop a new way of reviewing institutions that included a more proactive and flexible method, able to investigate particular themes or concerns.

The selection of the themes was intended to contribute to the enhancement as well as the quality of higher education in England and Northern Ireland. This report shows that the inclusion of the thematic element in the review process has brought a different perspective to these themes and has built upon existing knowledge in the UK higher education sector. The report provides useful and timely good practice guidance for higher education providers and the findings that it presents can be used to review and benchmark approaches to each theme in the future.

Main report

The thematic element of review

QAA visits institutions to review how well they are fulfilling their responsibilities for academic standards and quality. QAA uses 'peer review' methods that respect the autonomous and independent nature of universities in the UK.³

In 2011-13, higher education institutions were reviewed through a review method called Institutional Review for England and Northern Ireland (IRENI), and in 2012-13, higher education provision in further education colleges was reviewed through a method called Review of College Higher Education (RCHE). Each method has two components: a core element (leading to judgements on academic standards, quality of learning opportunities, information, and enhancement); and a predetermined **thematic element** or **theme** that does not lead to a judgement. The thematic element allows reviewers to explore an institution's engagement with a particular quality assurance topic, summarising their findings in a commentary in the review report. The theme topics for 2011-12 and 2012-13 were confirmed by the Quality in Higher Education Group (QHEG)⁴ on advice from QAA.

The inclusion of a thematic element in the review is intended to provide some flexibility and responsiveness within the review process to look in a timely way at issues that are attracting legitimate public interest or concern. This exploration of themes in Institutional Review is intended to contribute to enhancement of quality, as well as highlighting practice that can be improved.

The theme for 2011-12 was the **First Year Student Experience**.⁵ This theme continued in the subsequent academic year, 2012-13, when it was joined by a new theme: **Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement**.⁶ In 2012-13 institutions undergoing review were able to choose either theme.

This report provides an analysis of the ways in which universities and colleges approached these themes in their higher education provision in 2011-12 and 2012-13. It aims to:

- provide a snapshot of the First Year Student Experience across the UK higher education sector in 2011-12 and 2012-13
- provide a snapshot of Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement processes across the UK higher education sector in 2012-13
- produce useful good practice guidance for higher education providers, drawn from the thematic element of Institutional Review
- act as a possible basis for measuring change and developments in subsequent years.

³ For more information on the work of QAA, visit www.qaa.ac.uk

⁴ The Quality in Higher Education Group (QHEG) was a sector-wide group responsible for deciding themes to be covered.

⁵ Information on the First Year Student Experience theme:

www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/Documents/IRtheme.pdf

⁶ Information on the Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement theme:

www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/IRtheme_2012-13.pdf

Putting the thematic element into practice

The thematic element was operationalised as a key feature of the review process. Institutions were encouraged in their self-evaluation document (SED), submitted in advance of the review, to emphasise any arrangements or activities relevant to the theme. Similarly in the student written submission (SWS) student representative bodies were encouraged to focus on the institution's arrangements with respect to the theme. Reviewers, informed by the SED and SWS, and using prompts included in the further guidance, considered the institution's approach to the chosen theme through the normal schedule of meetings and through their reading of institutional documentation.

There are two ways in which each review report reflects the team's findings in relation to the theme. Firstly, under the various sections of the report, the review team may refer to the institution's approach to the theme in relation to the topic under consideration. Secondly, each report contains a specific commentary on the institution's approach to the theme. The commentary does not lead to any specific judgements but summarises the findings covered in the sections of the report.

Rationale for the themes

First Year Student Experience

The first year of higher education is critical for laying the foundations of academic study and for developing the key skills of independent learning and intellectual enquiry. It is also a time for learning how to cope with the demands of a new environment and personal responsibilities. The thematic element of review explored how well students are supported in these processes. It also looked to identify good practice that can be disseminated more widely.

Issues that were considered included:

- arrangements for induction and the first few weeks at the institution
- information for first year students
- academic advice and guidance
- learning support and access to resources
- assessment arrangements.

It was anticipated that the outcomes of the theme would constitute a reference point that institutions could use to review and benchmark their approaches to the First Year Student Experience.

There were three institutions which, after discussion with, and agreement from, QAA, interpreted the First Year Student Experience theme slightly differently given the context in which they work. It was more appropriate for one institution which does not provide undergraduate programmes to modify the theme to Transition to Postgraduate Study; another which delivers two-year undergraduate programmes agreed with QAA that it would be more appropriate to focus on the First Six Months after Enrolment in order to review how the university supports students' transition to higher education; while the third institution, which has a large proportion of international students, agreed with the review team to instead address the theme of the Experiences of International Students Entering UK Higher Education for the first time.

Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

If students are to be placed at the heart of the higher education system, they need to be given opportunities and encouragement both to provide feedback on their experiences and to contribute to changes and improvements in institutions. By involving students in quality assurance and enhancement, institutions enable them to be active participants in shaping their own education, and gain access to a vital source of feedback and creativity.

In recent years, Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement has become a higher priority for institutions, to the extent that it is now well established. Across the UK higher education sector, students' voices are heard and their views are being taken seriously. Alongside this, a body of research and resources relating to the wider field of student engagement continues to develop. This provides institutions with new perspectives on student involvement in quality (as well as other aspects of their learning), and provides support and guidance to those institutions who wish to develop and refine what they do.

In June 2012, *Chapter B5: Student engagement* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) was published. The chapter sets out what all UK higher education institutions can expect of each other in terms of student engagement, and what students and the general public can therefore expect of institutions. Institutions were encouraged to reflect closely on their student engagement activities during the academic year 2012-13 to ensure that they were in a position to meet this expectation by the autumn of 2013 (after which point the chapter was used as a reference point in Institutional Review).

The theme Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement was intended to consolidate the work that institutions were likely to be already undertaking to appraise their student engagement activities. The commentary on the theme was expected to extend beyond the territory covered in the 'quality of student learning opportunities' part of the review process, in order to provide institutions with the opportunity to present a fuller and more detailed picture of student involvement in quality, and showcase examples of good practice.

Institutions were likely to cover such topics as:

- innovations in student involvement in quality
- student contributions to enhancement
- staff experience of, or participation in, student involvement in quality
- closing the feedback loop.

It was anticipated that the outcomes of the theme would provide a snapshot of Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement across the UK higher education sector. This could then be used as a basis for measuring change and developments in subsequent years.

Setting the context for the thematic element

First Year Student Experience

There is a growing research literature on the student experience as well as an increasing range of institutional enhancement initiatives and strategies designed to improve retention, and to engage and empower students. As part of the broader interest in the student experience, the first year experience in higher education has been the topic of research and comment in academic and practitioner publications in the UK and worldwide for many years. However, more recently, research and initiatives relating to the student experience have

increasingly focused on the 'first year', identifying this as critical in laying the foundations for academic progression, retention and student success.

The literature includes a broad range of studies describing the First Year Student Experience, exploring the factors that exert both negative and positive influences on that experience, as well as describing and analysing initiatives to support students. Examples of publications containing valuable insights and overviews include, for example, a substantive literature review of the First Year Student Experience published by the Higher Education Academy (HEA).⁷ Another HEA output is the final report of a study by Yorke and Longden (2008) on the first year experience in higher education in the UK.⁸ The first year experience was the focus of an Enhancement Theme in Scotland in 2005-08.⁹ Over several years, QAA has been involved in student engagement research and has contributed to a range of research projects on the student experience - including research by the National Union of Students (NUS) on the first year student experience.¹⁰

Almost all the recently published literature on the student experience refers to students in their first year of undergraduate study. The literature review undertaken by Harvey, Drew and Smith (2006) does include literature relating to students in postgraduate study. Most literature addresses the experience of students in universities; there is very little on higher education students in colleges of further education, or other higher education providers. The literature has tended to focus on management and policy issues or on institutional strategies and initiatives. By contrast, only a limited amount of discipline-specific material is widely available.

The complexity of factors affecting the First Year Student Experience is widely recognised in the literature. A variety of conceptual models for understanding the student experience, and for developing initiatives to support students, are identified. Prominent among models used to understand students' decisions about withdrawing from their programme is Tinto's (1993) student integration model, which identifies the degree of students' 'academic' and 'social' integration as well as their commitment to their institution and goal as important predictors of persistence and success in the first year. Academic integration consists of meeting the explicit demands of the institution and identifying with the norms underpinning the academic system. Social integration is about how the individual student relates to other students and to the social system of the college or university.

The final report of the [What works? Student retention and success programme](#)¹¹ identifies different spheres of activity, complementing Tinto's social integration model. These are:

- the academic sphere, which can be extended to include learning in a range of settings, within and beyond the formal curriculum in the institution and in community and work-place settings
- the social sphere, including social spaces, clubs and societies, the students' union, and accommodation arrangements

7 Harvey, L; Drew, S and Smith, M (2006) *The first-year experience: a review of literature for the Higher Education Academy*, available at:

www.improvingthestudentexperience.com/library/UG_documents/first_year_experience_full_report_Harvey_et_al.pdf

8 York, M and Longden, B (2008) *The first year student experience of higher education in the UK*, available at: <http://jisctechdis.ac.uk/assets/Documents/archive/FYEFinalReport.pdf>

9 Enhancement Themes website: www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk

10 NUS (2012) *Student Experience Research 2012, Part 4: First Year Student Experience*, available at: www.nus.org.uk/PageFiles/12238/2012_NUS_QAA_First_Year.pdf

11 HEA (2012) *Building student engagement and belonging in higher education at a time of change: final report from the What Works? Student Retention and Success programme*, available at: www.heacademy.ac.uk/what-works-retention

- the professional service sphere, which includes participation in academic, pastoral and professional development activities.

What works? also develops and uses the idea of 'belonging', to focus on the importance of interpersonal relations, student perceptions and feelings of being connected to the institution, and the potential mismatch between a student's background and that of the institution which may result in students not feeling that they belong - and leaving early.

Although much of the research and debate concerning the First Year Student Experience is explicitly focused on retention, other aspects have been considered. For example, within the Enhancement Theme in Scotland on this topic the focus is not so much on retention as on the continual improvement of the student experience. The concepts of 'engagement' and 'empowerment' are used to explore and identify actions necessary to achieve a more dynamic relationship between the institution and the student. According to Mayes (2009) in his overview of the Enhancement Theme in 2006-08, engagement 'concerns a student's commitment and motivation to study'. Empowerment is defined as 'equipping the first year student with the competency to learn effectively'. From an institutional perspective, facilitating engagement is about devising interventions that encourage student participation in, and commitment to, study. Facilitating empowerment is about devising interventions that help students to take more control over, and responsibility for, their learning.¹²

The diversity of students and their experience, and the need to develop targeted approaches to enhance student success, is addressed in much of the recent literature. It is acknowledged that many first year students in the twenty-first century are unlike 'traditional' entrants to higher education. They may have different expectations, different ways of learning and different lifestyle pressures outside their academic lives. The concept of 'personalisation' was used within the First Year Student Experience Enhancement Theme in Scotland to encapsulate a process of meeting the differing needs of students.¹³

From the research literature, a range of factors have been identified as making a difference to the first year experience and promoting engagement. These include, for example: information provided for students; students' transition to higher education; induction and orientation; personal development planning; the development of academic and study skills; peer support; curriculum design, assessment and feedback; monitoring retention and progression; use of technology to facilitate communication; respect for diverse learning styles; and student feedback on their first year experience.

Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

Student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement has increased in significance in recent years as part of wider debate and national policy development. Institutions have developed strategies and initiatives relating to student engagement, which is defined in a variety of ways and in a variety of contexts.

Based on an extensive review of literature on student engagement, Trowler (HEA, 2010) provides a definition as follows:

Student engagement is concerned with the interaction between the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions intended to

¹² QAA (2009) *Quality Enhancement Themes: The First Year Experience, Overview of the Enhancement Theme, 2006-08*, available at:

www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/docs/publications/first-year-overview-aims-achievements-challenges.pdf

¹³ QAA (2008) *Quality Enhancement Themes: The First Year Experience, Personalisation of the first year*, available at: www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/docs/publications/the-first-year-experience-personalisation-of-the-first-year.pdf?sfvrsn=12

optimise the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and reputation of the institution (Trowler, 2010, page 3).¹⁴

Student engagement activities in higher education in the UK takes many different forms. These include:

- improving the motivation of students to engage in learning and to learn independently
- enabling students to participate in quality enhancement and quality assurance processes, with a resultant improvement in their educational experience.

In the latter case, student engagement may include: student feedback, student evaluation of teaching, student representation, and student participation in governance.

Research specifically focused on student involvement in quality enhancement and assurance processes in higher education institutions is developing - although there is currently little available on higher education in further education colleges. A significant part of recent research has been commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and by QAA as part of their strategies to work with students and others with a stake in higher education to ensure a higher quality learning experience that meets the needs of students.

The research indicates that higher education institutions use a variety of mechanisms to support and promote Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement. Recent review reports suggest that the vast majority now have systems in place for student representation, both at organisational level and within individual faculties, schools or departments. Students are involved in senior boards and committees, in periodic review, and in staff-student liaison activities. A collaborative approach with students' unions (where they exist) is evident.

Evidence of student involvement in enhancement activities is less common, although there is a growing number of examples of students' involvement in developing teaching and learning, especially assessment practices. Some difficulties in involving students are reported. This includes filling representative roles, and engaging 'hard to reach' groups such as postgraduate, part-time, work-based learners, and distance-learners. However, it is clear that higher education providers are seeking to be increasingly innovative in the way in which they involve students in what they do.

A variety of models conceptualising how student engagement works within institutions are depicted in the research on institutional practices. This suggests that achieving the goal of students as 'partners' in educational enhancement and quality assurance has some way to go, and that other perspectives on student roles are also important in shaping the relationship between students and institutions in processes of engagement. For example, HEA's [Framework for action: enhancing student engagement at the institutional level](#) (HEA, 2010, page 3)¹⁵ suggests that two models of student engagement can be identified. The first identifies students in higher education primarily as 'consumers', the second identifies them as 'partners' in a learning community.

14 Trowler, V and Trowler, P (2010) *Student engagement evidence summary*, available at: www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/studentengagement/StudentEngagementEvidenceSummary.pdf
15 HEA (2010) *Framework for action: enhancing student engagement at the institutional level*, available at: www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/studentengagement/Frameworks_for_action_index

A third model is provided by van der Velden, et al (2013).¹⁶ The authors report that the perception of the students' role held most strongly by both institutions and students' unions that took part in the research, is that of 'stakeholders'. Some respondents used the term stakeholder to indicate an intermediate position between consumer and partner (sometimes relating to the idea of an institutional journey from consumer to partner) and some felt it had to be recognised that students were consumers as well as stakeholders or partners.

Student involvement in the quality assurance and enhancement of their own education has become a high priority for institutions and has become more established in recent years. Across the UK higher education sector student voices are being heard and students' views are being taken seriously. As with the theme First Year Student Experience, this theme was chosen with the intention to build upon it and bring a different perspective.

¹⁶ van der Velden, G M; Naidoo, R; Lowe, P C; Pimental Botas, P C and Pool, A D (2013) *Student Engagement in Learning and Teaching Quality Management*, available at: www.bath.ac.uk/learningandteaching/pdf/student_engagement/Project_Report_11.9.2013.pdf

Methodology

Focus

Forty-eight Institutional Reviews are analysed in this report:

- 37 higher education institutions reviewed through Institutional Review for England and Northern Ireland (IRENI) in 2011-12 and 2012-13
- 11 colleges reviewed through Review of College Higher Education (RCHE) in 2012-13.

The First Year Student Experience was explored in 25 institutions:

- 15 higher education institutions that were required to address this theme in 2011-12
- four (out of 22) higher education institutions that chose this theme in 2012-13
- six (out of 11) colleges that chose this theme in 2012-13.

Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement was explored in 23 institutions:

- 18 (out of 22) higher education institutions that chose this theme in 2012-13
- five (out of 11) Colleges that chose this theme in 2012-13.

Approach and data sources

The source material used as the basis of this report includes: published IRENI and RCHE reports, institutional self-evaluation documents, student written submissions, and the supplementary evidence base for each review. In addition, the research draws on QAA's good practice and recommendation knowledgebases^{17 18} derived from review reports, and an interim theme analysis based on the IRENI review activity in 2011-12.

Content analysis has been used to interrogate the various source documents, in order to identify current practice and distinctive approaches to each theme. Attention has been paid to different stakeholder views and interpretations of practice as reflected in the source documents. The following document types were analysed:

- 48 published reports
- 48 self-evaluation documents
- 43 student written submissions
- 48 evidence bases compiled by review teams.

As no judgement was made on the thematic element of review, the thematic commentaries in review reports tend to be short and descriptive rather than evaluative. Only in a very small number of cases do reviewers make either substantive criticism or open commendation of institutional practice in this area, generally restricting themselves to confirming the statements made by institutions in their self-evaluation documents.

17 QAA good practice knowledgebase: www.qaa.ac.uk/improvinghighereducation/goodpractice

18 QAA recommendations knowledgebase: www.qaa.ac.uk/improvinghighereducation/recommendations

Findings: First Year Student Experience

How the theme was addressed in reviews

Institutional perspective

The predominant approach used by institutions to address the theme was to describe, in the self-evaluation document, how they supported students' transition to higher education, and what information they provided to first year students. Aspects of assessment and feedback, and of monitoring retention and progression, were described through generic practice rather than focusing on specific strategies relating to first year students.

The published supporting guidance on the theme encouraged institutions to reflect on what works well, and on evaluating their activities in relation to the first year student experience. There did not appear to be widespread reference to the guidelines and/or consideration of the impact that the institution's activities had on the first year student experience.

Where the opportunity was taken by institutions to describe the values that underpin the first year student experience there tended to be recognition of the importance of managing student transition in laying the foundation for subsequent study and achievement.

Student perspective

Students' response to the theme, where it was addressed, tended to be descriptive and drew upon the output from student surveys and/or focus groups. This in some cases was supplemented with student quotations expressing their personal viewpoint. There was limited reflection in the addressing of the points raised in the guidance.

Although students wrote in positive terms about their first year student experience, they also took the opportunity to raise matters of concern regarding their experience and smooth transition into study.

Reviewer perspective

As no judgement was made on the thematic element of review, the thematic commentaries in review reports tend to be descriptive. Only in a few cases do reviewers make either substantive criticism or open commendation of institutional practice in this area, generally restricting themselves to confirming the statements made by institutions in their SEDs.

Nevertheless, there are a number of both features of good practice and recommendations that relate to the theme (see Appendix 2).

Overview of the findings

Institutions were asked to consider the following elements for the First Year Student Experience theme:

- how students were supported during their transition period into higher education
- information provided to first year students
- assessment arrangements and feedback
- monitoring of student progression and retention.

Transition into higher education

Institutions demonstrated that they understand the benefit of student induction in creating a sense of belonging and preparing students for the successful completion of their course of study.

In many cases, there is a standard approach to coordinating and managing induction across the institution. At one institution there is an Induction Management Group that has oversight of the first year induction programme. In another institution, there has been involvement with their partner higher education institution to identify ways of enhancing the First Year Student Experience. Some institutions take deliberate steps to raise staff awareness of the importance of induction. In one case a publication on *Integrating students into academic community: examples of good practice* was used to disseminate ideas about how to support students during the transition.

Institutions use structured induction programmes to support students who are new to higher education, and this was seen as an important element of the transition process. This often takes the form of a standard institutional induction together with course level activities. Students, on the whole, seem satisfied with this approach although in one case it was noted that there should be greater emphasis on the course dimension.

In addition to the structured induction programmes offered to students, some institutions offered differentiated induction activities aimed at particular groups, such as students with disabilities and their parents, mature students, those living off-campus and international students. In one case, flexible timetabling is used to allow students to balance family, work and other commitments. Systems were in place for students who miss induction although it was noted that it is important to better publicise these opportunities.

Relationship building with first year students is seen to be a key component of the induction process. This includes developing relationships with both staff at the institution and other students. Students value the opportunity to meet with academic and support staff and, in particular, personal tutors. Technology also plays an important role in the transition process, for example institutions make use of social media to encourage students to engage with the institution and each other prior to enrolment.

Induction schemes often include an element of peer mentoring, with second and third year students agreeing to welcome and support new students. In one case peer mentors helped students understand why generic modules were included in the course. A variation, in one institution, was the use of Higher Education Learning Mentors (HELMs) who play a key role in supporting students through application, induction and their continuing studies. The mentors are accessible to all higher education students in a flexible manner to ensure that they have access to additional support and advice as and when it is needed most.

Online resources are available, in many cases, to help students develop academic skills, including academic writing, and to understand the need to avoid plagiarism and the associated penalties.

Incidents of student dissatisfaction were noted where logins were not available and where students had been required to provide the same information more than once (to their institution and the awarding body or other relevant external organisation).

A particular emphasis for further education college environments was the need to make a clear distinction between higher and further education. This was also reflected in the resources and facilities made available to the students. Representatives of awarding

universities were involved in the induction process and in one case visited students towards the end of the first year to contribute to the briefings of students progressing onto level 5 study.

Information provided to first year students

Students are provided with information about their course of study and more generic background information to support their transition into their respective institutions. This information primarily takes the form of handbooks available electronically and/or in hard copy. There were examples of students being involved in reviewing and helping to rewrite handbooks. There was also evidence of information being made more interactive and accessible.

Some institutions highlighted the need to check that the information they provide is meaningful and useful. Reference is made to pre-and post-arrival information. This is illustrated by the example of an institution where information is provided as part of a staged process, providing students with appropriate information at enquiry, application, registration and enrolment. Students confirmed that this information was helpful both prior to their arrival and during the initial weeks of study.

The value of student information being clearly written was illustrated by one institution, where the diverse student population appreciated having received information that made no assumptions about students' familiarity with UK conventions.

International students, in many cases, receive specific information. In one case they were provided with information on etiquette.

Information was provided on a range of areas and in a variety of forms. Some received memory sticks containing key documents. Generally information was accessible through the institution's website, intranet and virtual learning environment. The purpose of these platforms is to act as a depository for student information and, in some cases, as a one-stop resource. Institutions recognise, accordingly, that students need an induction into the use of these online information sources at the start of their studies.

Some institutions provide an applicant portal, allowing students to track their application, gain direct access to general information, and easily find relevant resources and information about their courses. In one case there was guidance on the application and interview processes, and written feedback on the interview.

On the whole students are satisfied with the information made available to them. Any concerns tended to relate to: information about the cost of materials not being clear, handbooks not being available at the start of the course, and timetables or other resources not being available online when needed.

Assessment arrangements and feedback

All institutions recognise the importance of assessment: in particular, the use of early formative assessment to aid transition into higher education. They also acknowledge the importance of providing feedback that is timely, supportive and developmental. In one institution, expectations about the amount and level of assessed work that will need to be completed are made clear at interview, thereby emphasising the importance of assessment from the outset.

Students indicated that they were provided with clear, accessible and appropriate guidance on completing assessment tasks, and that they generally felt well briefed. Information on assessment includes details of assessment criteria, intended learning outcomes and opportunities for formative assessment. Specific sessions explaining the UK assessment process were provided for international students at some institutions.

The role and use of formative assessment is recognised within institutions. One institution's assessment strategy stated that all first year students should receive formative assessment in the first six weeks of their course, which students found helpful. Students had also received advice on how to best use the formative feedback they received to gain better results in summative assessment tasks.

Feedback on assessment is provided in a variety of ways, including: online module assessment feedback, direct feedback through a personal tutor system, by video from performance assessment, and in lectures delivered by staff. Feedback can be provided on an individual basis or to a group, depending on what is appropriate. Students at one institution reported that feedback had been enhanced through the use of a new feedback form. In one institution, it was noted that opportunities are provided for students to comment on the feedback given to them; this enables them to become more reflective learners and assists the transition into a culture of independent learning.

Various approaches are used to develop students' understanding of academic writing and academic integrity, including taught modules, online tutorials and personal development planning. One institution has structured the first year of study to encourage the development of academic writing and associated skills, with a variety of formative and summative assessment tasks. This is appreciated by students, particularly those with limited recent experience of studying. The module was supplemented by guidance on good academic practice, including avoidance of plagiarism, use of the Harvard referencing system and submission of work for checking by anti-plagiarism software.

The management and avoidance of plagiarism is emphasised within institutions. One institution has refreshed its policy on the use of anti-plagiarism software, recognising its value as a deterrent. There is a strong emphasis on educating students to avoid plagiarism rather than merely penalising those who transgress.

Examples of previous marked work such as dissertations are available, and in one institution students are able to review them on the virtual learning environment.

There were, however, a number of recommendations made regarding the need for assessment practices to be monitored, to ensure that students have clear information on assignment schedules and receive timely and informative feedback.

Monitoring retention and progression

Although all institutions record retention and progression rates as part of their annual monitoring, they also use a variety of means to monitor progression and review students' personal development on an ongoing basis. The monitoring of individual students' academic progress is primarily through the use of tutors and tutorials. The frequency of tutorials varies with each institution; in at least one case tutors meet on a weekly basis with students.

One review team identified good practice with respect to monitoring students' progression. The institution had put in place a process where new students and staff draw up contracts identifying their respective expectations and responsibilities. The contracts are linked to the students' personal development plans. Students and staff meet frequently to discuss

progress, which is recorded, and students are able to provide feedback on this supervision through discussion with deans. Other institutions use an 'open door' policy, allowing students access to academic staff to discuss any concerns they may have, while others use a more structured approach, providing scheduled opportunities for staff and students to meet to discuss progress.

Institutions also recognise the importance of monitoring attendance and participation in formative assessment. In some instances, they saw this as a means to identify students who need additional support.

Monitoring identifies students who are at risk of not continuing. Institutions employ different mechanisms to support these 'at risk' students. These include meetings with tutors and senior academic staff to devise improvement strategies, together with additional support. Institutions seek to ascertain why students drop out, and undertake exit surveys.

Many institutions undertake regular reviews of student retention data, in addition to their annual monitoring. In one instance, a senior member of staff reviews withdrawals to ensure all possible steps to guide and support students have been undertaken. In another instance Learner Services record the effectiveness of any interventions made to support students.

Conclusions

The evidence demonstrates that there is sound practice across the UK higher education sector in ensuring that the first year student experience facilitates a smooth and seamless transition into higher education.

There is evidence that, specifically:

- student induction is effectively coordinated and managed across the institution
- best practice in integrating students into the institution is disseminated to staff
- induction programmes are differentiated to meet the needs of particular groups of students
- mentoring schemes are used to support students' transition into higher education
- meaningful information is provided for each stage in the application and transition process
- formative assessment and timely feedback are used to prepare students for the requirements of summative assessment
- there are systems for managing 'at risk' students and for evaluating intervention strategies used to support students.

However, there are a number of areas where it is broadly acknowledged that further development is needed to avoid students becoming demotivated and/or frustrated during their transition into higher education:

- avoid information overload and ensure there is an appropriate balance between generic and course-specific information
- ensure that information is available in a timely manner, especially course-specific information such as timetables and handbooks
- avoid requiring students to produce duplicate information
- ensure feedback on assessment is timely, supportive and developmental.

Findings: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

How the theme was addressed in reviews

Institutional perspective

The treatment of this theme in the context of the self-evaluation document (SED) presented some challenges to institutions, in determining how to divide material between the thematic section and the section of the quality of learning opportunities judgement area entitled 'There is an effective contribution of students to quality assurance'. Some institutions chose to cross-reference extensively, some simply indicated that the theme had been covered in the judgement area, while others placed the more 'routine' aspects of student engagement (the student representative system, committee memberships and similar formal aspects) in the judgement area while reserving the thematic section for discussion of specific initiatives to increase student engagement.

The theme specifically referred to 'involvement in quality assurance and enhancement', and nearly all institutions took this to exclude a broader discussion of more pedagogic aspects such as, for example, students being co-creators of their own learning.

Several institutions took this choice of theme as an opportunity to work with students to evaluate their practice in this area, and, where necessary, strengthen it. Resulting changes are sometimes reported, either in the SED or in the review report.

Student perspective

Students' understanding of the theme largely coincided with that of institutions, tending to focus on representation and communication. In those institutions that exhibited the most highly developed approaches to student involvement, this was clearly reflected in the student written submission (SWS); likewise, where approaches were less developed, students appeared to have a narrower view of what might be possible.

While many student submissions acknowledged the good intentions of their institution in relation to engagement, comments noting a gap between intention and achievement, or drawing attention to patchy implementation of institutional policy across different faculties and departments, were fairly common.

Reviewer perspective

As no judgement was made on the thematic element of review, the thematic commentaries in review reports tend to be descriptive. Only in a few cases do reviewers make either substantive criticism or open commendation of institutional practice, generally restricting themselves to confirming the statements made by institutions in their SEDs.

Nevertheless, there are a number of both features of good practice and recommendations that relate to this theme (see Appendix 3).

Overview of the findings

While institutions, without exception, mention how important it is to them to hear the student voice, and to operate in partnership with their students, it is evident that the practicalities of this partnership are interpreted in widely differing ways. Each institution is necessarily

distinctive; however, it is possible to identify three broad groupings in terms of practice on student involvement.

In a relatively small group of institutions, student engagement is highly developed, pervading institutional culture and clearly recognised by staff and students alike. These institutions tended to be those where related features of good practice were found; some had also taken part in QAA student engagement projects. Students in these institutions genuinely viewed themselves, and were viewed by staff, as partners in the enhancement of the quality of their learning experience, and appeared to take a broad view of what that enhancement might entail.

The great majority of institutions had well-embedded systems for student representation and committee membership, and either had already involved, or were planning to involve, students in quality assurance activities such as periodic reviews and initial course approvals. Various forms of survey, both internal (for example at the end of module delivery) and external (as with the National Student Survey) were invariably mentioned, though the use to which the results of these surveys was put was not always so prominent. It appeared that many of these institutions either were still in the process of implementing effective student involvement, or did not perceive a necessity to go beyond the information-gathering activities mentioned above.

In a small number of cases, student involvement was limited to completion of surveys and a rather reactive student representation system. Several of these cases related to higher education courses delivered in further education colleges, where higher education students constitute only a small proportion of the overall student body, and where structures may be more aligned to the needs of further education students.

Student representation

Selection

All the institutions covered by this report operate a student representation system. Course representatives appear to be chosen by a mixture of methods: formal election, informal show of hands in a classroom session, volunteering, or approach by a member of staff.

Only a small number of institutions operate an online voting system for selection of representatives, though others are considering introducing this. Students at a number of institutions noted that the processes for selecting student representatives varied between departments, with no single institution-wide process in place.

The difficulty of engaging students and selecting representatives among hard-to-reach groups was widely acknowledged. The SED for one further education college noted that many students on its higher education programmes are adults in full-time work and find it difficult to attend meetings outside the normal times of their classes. The challenge of reaching other groups such as research students and taught postgraduates was also widely acknowledged, both by institutions and by students' unions.

The SED for one validating university indicated that the requirement for student representation was included in Memoranda of Agreement with partners.

Development, organisation and training

Almost all institutions provided some form of training and/or development for representatives, though the mechanisms by which this was delivered were varied. Many institutions have a staff member, appointed and paid either by the students' union or jointly by the union and the institution, whose role it is to coordinate training and development. A range of titles applied to these roles: for example, Staff-Student Liaison Committee Coordinator or Student Engagement Coordinator. At one institution, the existence of two Student Representative Coordinator roles, one for each campus, was considered a feature of good practice. In a small number of cases, this post is entirely funded and managed by the institution; thus at one private institution the Chief Executive of Students is appointed and paid by the university, as a consequence of which the independence of the role was queried by the review report.

Training for representatives is generally delivered either by the students' union and the institution working together, or exclusively by the students' union with the support of the Student Engagement Officer or similar staff member. Training methods vary, and include both face-to-face events and online resources (or a combination of the two). The degree of student support for training events varied: one large institution reported that it had attracted roughly 350 students to its training event at the start of the year, and another SED reported that, following a number of initiatives to enhance student engagement (undertaken as part of a QAA-supported project), the status of student representatives had risen considerably, with a consequent increase in attendance at training events.

In a number of institutions, a role as representative can lead to, or contribute to, recognition in the form of a university certificate or other award. For example, at one large civic university, service as a representative can constitute part of the requirement for the university's Graduate Award, while a private institution has recently introduced awards for 'service to the university'. In one of the most detailed representative development schemes three levels of development are recognised, the highest of which entitles a representative to be entered for the NUS 'Rep of the Year' award.

A small number of institutions organise forums in which representatives from across the institution can meet; in one case this takes the form of an annual Student Rep Conference, and in another there is a RepSoc to which student representatives automatically belong.

Representative training for off-campus students is variable. Some further education colleges deliver training in conjunction with their awarding partners. Some awarding institutions provide online material for training representatives in partner organisations. The SWS from one awarding university noted that the students' union did not provide support for representatives in partner organisations - this appears to be a widespread issue, since in most cases students' unions are funded only for on-site student numbers.

There was very little criticism of how representatives are selected and trained, either by institutions themselves or by students or reviewers. One further education college received a recommendation to 'Formalise systems for the election, training and ongoing support of higher education student representatives to ensure they are informed of their responsibilities and can more effectively represent their peers.' But more generally students appeared to be appreciative of training opportunities, even when they believed there was more to be done; for example, one SWS acknowledged the improvements arising from the university's work on representative development.

Representation on institutional committees

Almost universally SEDs indicate that students are represented on committees at all levels of the institution. However, student representation and students' view of it differ markedly between committees at different levels.

Staff-student liaison committees/course committees

It is at this level, not surprisingly, that student engagement is strongest, since matters of direct relevance to students courses will typically be discussed. Titles used for these committees, and the range of courses they relate to, vary; here we use staff-student liaison committee (SSLC) as a generic term.

In the most fully developed SSLC systems, committees are chaired or co-chaired by students. In at least one case SSLC secretaries are also students, with support provided by staff. A similar system for chairing by students pertains at another university, where an annual report on the SSLC system to the university's central management results in an action plan to address any emerging issues. Several SWSs mention that practice on chairing is variable between departments, due to the devolution of detailed operational procedures. One SWS indicates that, following a successful trial period, moves to have all staff-student course committees formally chaired by students were opposed by staff, with the result that the practice continues only through informal arrangements in some departments.

In the more common situation where students are simply members of SSLC or course committees, institutions have adopted various initiatives to make the system more effective. For example, in one university a booklet for staff has been produced which describes the way in which the student representative system is intended to operate, and Student Experience Champions have been appointed - these are members of academic staff at departmental level who liaise between student representatives and the department. A number of institutions in their SEDs mention initiatives to encourage students to contribute to meetings, for example through standing agenda items for student business.

Committees at faculty and institutional level

By far the most common mechanism for securing student engagement in senior institutional committees is to offer membership ex officio to students' union sabbatical or other officers. This can be effective, but it can also lead to overload on a small number of individuals, particularly in college settings where there are few or no sabbatical officers; for example the SWS for one further education college mentions that two part-time sabbatical officers cover all committee attendance.

While students engage with course committees and SSLCs out of a direct interest, and with university-level committees because of their involvement in students' union activity, it can be challenging to achieve effective student representation at faculty level in institutions where the faculty structure plays an important role in governance. This is recognised by both students and institutions, with both the SED and the SWS for one large university acknowledging that this is the least effective level of representation.

A number of institutions now have a central committee, reporting at a high level, with responsibility for the student experience, or a similar remit. For example, in one case the Vice-Chancellor chairs the Council/Senate/Students' Union group, which receives feedback directly from students' union representatives on matters of current concern to students.

Meetings between senior staff and students' union officers

It is common for students' union officers to meet with senior university staff (the Vice-Chancellor and/or the Pro Vice-Chancellors). Heads of central service departments such as libraries, the registry and similar areas are often also involved. Such meetings, which may take place once a term or more frequently, provide a less formal complement to the structures offered by the committee system.

Communication from the institution to students

Institutions are well aware of the need to 'close the loop' by letting students know what has occurred as a consequence of their input. Initiatives with titles such as 'You said, we listened' are commonplace, making use both of physical resources such as noticeboards and information screens, and of dedicated online spaces.

However, this is also one of the areas about which students are most critical. This is particularly the case where they are left to read minutes of committees - often difficult to find on an intranet - or to speak to their representative in order to learn about matters potentially affecting them. In smaller institutions such as further education colleges, speaking informally to helpful staff may be more effective than any formal channel. Students are also aware of inconsistencies - in some cases pronounced - between the quality of communication in different departments and schools, depending on the attitude of staff.

Most institutions are aware of the need to improve their performance in this area, but there does not seem to be any one strategy emerging that is particularly successful. Some approaches used include involving students in strategic planning, so that the student body is aware of major developments at an early stage; increasing the profile of student representatives - for example, in one institution by issuing them with purple hoodies - so that other students will know whom to approach in order to learn of developments; and experiments with the use of social media.

Involvement of students in periodic review and course approval

It appears to be a given that institutions now interview groups of students from a particular course when that course is undergoing periodic review/revalidation. This process seems to be well embedded throughout the higher education sector.

The appointment of students as full members of periodic review panels is also becoming widespread. This membership generally starts with students' union officers and is then extended to other student representatives. Training is usually provided. While most student bodies welcome the opportunity to take part in such reviews, a few note the workload that this can entail, particularly where it is confined to a small number of individuals, or where relatively short notice of a review event is given. Likewise, a number of institutions, while expressing the determination to appoint students to panels, point out that it is not always easy to find students willing to take up this opportunity.

Involvement of students in the approval of new courses is less common, possibly because there will not always be a body of students with relevant experience who can be consulted, as is the case with an existing course.

Surveys

By far the most prominent means of engaging students is through questionnaire-based surveys, both external (for example, the National Student Survey (NSS), Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey, and International Student Barometer) and internal (for example at the end of a module or an academic year). Only in the review report for one institution was the point made that insufficient student feedback was sought.

Most institutions have formal processes for analysing and acting upon the outcomes of these surveys, for example by action planning at a departmental and/or institutional level; some are, however, aware that the results of external surveys may not be available until the relevant cohort of students has moved on, and so are conscious of the need for internal surveys which can generate more rapid action.

There is some concern that an element of survey fatigue may be setting in, demonstrated in some institutions by declining response rates. Other methods of obtaining student opinion, such as focus groups, are therefore also in use.

Students also, to judge from the SWSs, regard surveys as synonymous with enhancement. The submissions from two students' unions noted that the volume of communication to students from the institution appeared to increase substantially during the 'NSS season'.

Teaching awards

A common method to engage students more fully with their own learning is by establishing awards for outstanding teaching. In some cases these are organised entirely by students; in others jointly by students and the institution, with funding generally being provided by the latter.

Named initiatives

In a number of review reports, specific initiatives to increase student engagement were mentioned. These include:

- the Back to the Floor initiative at Anglia Ruskin University, in which Deputy Vice-Chancellors attend course committees in order to maintain a perspective on the student experience; as a result of this, a number of improvements have been made to the conduct of meetings to make them more student-friendly
- the Better@Bath initiative where students highlight achievements in the area of teaching and learning.
- the ContriBUte programme at Bournemouth University which aims to increase engagement by means of volunteering
- the biannual magazine produced by students at Southampton Solent University to showcase enhancement activity
- the Student as Producer initiative at Lincoln University, which led to a 'commended' judgement on enhancement by the review team
- the 'buddying' scheme between Pro Vice-Chancellors and students' union officers at the University of Sheffield
- the Talkback system at Gloucestershire College for students to express both complaints and compliments.

Conclusions

The evidence demonstrates that there is much embedded sound practice across the UK higher education sector in relation to the involvement of students in quality assurance and enhancement.

There is evidence that, specifically:

- systems for student representation, both at course and at higher levels, are almost universal across the UK higher education sector, and some form of associated training is generally provided
- processes for capturing students' opinions, usually via surveys at various levels, are in place (all institutions reviewed)
- most higher education institutions have appointed, or are planning to appoint, student members of periodic review, course approval and course re-approval panels
- many higher education institutions foster good relations between the students' union or other student representative body and the institution, often by means of regular meetings between senior university staff and students' union officers
- schemes for rewarding perceived excellence in teaching, either wholly operated by students or involving a strong element of student involvement, are widespread
- most institutions are aware of the need to extend the concept of student engagement beyond these formal levels, and a range of initiatives are in place across the sector to address this.

However, there are a number of areas where it is broadly acknowledged that further development is needed, principally:

- 'close loops' by informing students what has taken place as a consequence of their representatives' activities
- communicate more with the student body about major initiatives and changes
- ensure consistency of practice between different areas of the institution (departments, schools, and so on) in implementing centrally agreed policies
- engage 'difficult to reach' student groups such as taught postgraduate and research students, distance-learning students and those in off-campus partner institutions
- generate the cultural change needed to ensure that students are recognised as, and treated as, full partners in the process of ensuring and enhancing the quality of their learning experience.

Implications for the future of the thematic review

This analysis of the themes for 2011-13 can be used to review and benchmark approaches to each theme in the future. The outcomes contribute to the knowledge already existing in the higher education sector, adding another perspective. It is evident that institutions are responsive to the current issues raised in the thematic element. The identification of sound practice and areas for future development form practical guidance for institutions. There is clear value in the thematic aspect of review and in developing it further in the future.

In 2013-15, as in 2012-13, institutions will be required to explore one of two themes, which have been selected by the Higher Education Review Group (HERG).¹⁹ The theme Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement continues, and it is joined by a new theme: Employability. The steps that providers of higher education take to improve the employability of their students and graduates has emerged as an important area for discussion both within higher education providers and in the wider community. Student employability, like Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement, is high on the educational and political agenda.

¹⁹ The Higher Education Review Group (HERG) includes representatives of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Universities UK, GuildHE and the Association of Colleges (AoC) and is now responsible for selecting the theme.

Overall conclusion

QAA was asked to develop a new way of reviewing institutions that was more proactive and flexible, providing the opportunity to investigate particular themes or concerns. The selection of the themes was intended to contribute to enhancement as well as quality. There is evidence that institutions have embraced the purpose of both themes and that a number of sound initiatives have been set up across the higher education sector, though practice is sometimes inconsistent.

The commentaries on the themes in review reports indicate that they were well chosen and appropriate. The analysis does show, however, that institutions were generally descriptive rather than evaluative in responding to the themes and in some cases missed opportunities to effectively represent their strengths.

Evidence from students generally corroborates what institutions say about how they are approaching these themes and demonstrates a good level of support from students. The analysis indicates that the themes are of relevance to students.

Students value the initiatives taken by their institutions to improve the experience of first year students and to hear and respond to the student voice. Ensuring that feedback on assessment is timely, supportive and developmental continues to be a key issue for students. There is still some distance to travel in many institutions to develop their students as equal partners in quality assurance and enhancement. For both themes there still exists a gap between the aspirations of the institution and the perceptions of the student, though in the most developed institutions this gap is smaller.

List of abbreviations

AoC	Association of Colleges
HEA	Higher Education Academy
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HELM	Higher Education Learning Mentor
HERG	Higher Education Review Group
IRENI	Institutional Review for England and Northern Ireland
NUS	National Union of Students
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
QHEG	Quality in Higher Education Group
RCHE	Review of College Higher Education
SED	self-evaluation document
SSLC	staff-student liaison committee
SWS	student written submission

Appendix 1: List of providers by review year, theme and method

2011-12 First Year Student Experience (IRENI)

Anglo-European College of Chiropractic
Greenwich School of Management
Institute of Cancer Research²⁰
Ravensbourne
Royal Agricultural College (now Royal Agricultural University)
Royal College of Art
Royal College of Music
Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance
University College Falmouth (now Falmouth University)
University for the Creative Arts
University of Buckingham²¹
University of Chichester
University of Exeter
University of Leeds
University of York

2012-13 First Year Student Experience (IRENI)

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine²²
Royal Academy of Music
Royal Central School of Speech and Drama
University of Keele

2012-13 First Year Student Experience (RCHE)

Blackpool and The Fylde College
Burton and South Derbyshire College
City and Islington College
The Isle of Wight College
Kingston Maurward College
South Gloucestershire and Stroud College

2012-13 Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement (IRENI)

Anglia Ruskin University
Bournemouth University
BPP University College of Professional Studies Limited (Now BPP University)
City University London
Richmond, The American International University in London
Roehampton University
School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London
Southampton Solent University

²⁰ Used a modified theme, namely the Transition to Postgraduate Study.

²¹ Used a modified theme, namely the First Six Months of Enrolment.

²² Used a modified theme, namely the Experiences of International Students Entering UK Higher Education for the First Time.

University of Bath
University of Brighton
University of Cambridge
University of Lincoln
University of Reading
University of Salford
University of Sheffield
University of Sussex
University of the Arts London
University of Warwick

2012-13 Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement (RCHE)

Colchester Institute
Doncaster College
Gloucestershire College
MidKent College
Stephenson College

Appendix 2: Features of good practice and recommendations relating to the theme First Year Student Experience

This is an illustrative list of institutions where features of good practice and recommendations were identified in IRENI and RCHE reports. Readers are reminded that not all of these institutions specifically addressed this theme (some had opted for Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement).

Features of good practice

Blackpool and The Fylde College: The comprehensive and continuing development of the virtual learning environment that facilitates effective dissemination of information, providing a 'one-stop shop' for students and staff.

Colchester Institute: The College's development and constructive use of detailed assessment and grading criteria to facilitate students' understanding of expectations about achievement at each level of study.

The Isle of Wight College: The high-quality student support provided by the Learning Resources Centre, Careers Service and Student Services, which enriches the student experience.

The Isle of Wight College: The widespread and frequent consideration of management information by managers and tutors at appropriate intervals in order to facilitate early intervention and support for students.

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine: The rich diversity of the student body feeds into the peer support networks; these are encouraged and facilitated by the School both in face-to-face and distance-learning provision.

Roehampton University: The availability of effective academic writing modules at different academic levels for international students.

Roehampton University: The international section of the website, which clearly relates the University's entry criteria to national qualifications in the countries of origin of most international students.

Royal Central School of Speech and Drama: The School's admissions process, and its thoroughness and sensitivity to individual students' needs.

Royal College of Music: The exemplary support for disabled students including the support offered through the application stage, comprehensive handbooks for students and staff, and the individually tailored learning agreements.

Royal College of Music: The high level of individual support provided for prospective students including open days, the applicant portal, information packs, and the well managed audition process.

Southampton Solent University: The comprehensive and inclusive range of support mechanisms for students, as exemplified by succeed@solent.

University of Bath: The systematic provision of accessible, reliable and up to date information for students, staff and the public.

University of Leeds: The University's comprehensive and detailed policies and procedures for the admission of students to the University.

University of Lincoln: The 'Getting Started' information pack and associated processes for new students.

University of Sheffield: The provision of a residential orientation scheme to introduce international students to their university environment as part of the wider programme of induction.

University of York: The successful establishment of the Mathematics Skills Centre to support students across a wide of range of disciplines.

Recommendations

City and Islington College: make sure all students can access the virtual learning environment from the start of their course.

Isle of Wight College: Monitor assessment processes to ensure that students have clear information on assignment schedules and receive prompt and informative feedback, in accordance with the College's own policy.

Stephenson College: Implement admissions policies and procedures that are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied to ensure that students are admitted to appropriate programmes at appropriate levels.

Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance: Ensure that timetables are made available to students in time for the commencement of the academic year concerned.

University of Brighton: Strengthen oversight of partner institutions' published information to ensure its accuracy, currency and comprehensiveness.

University of Salford: Ensure that all staff who are responsible for teaching or supporting students with disabilities have a full understanding of students' individual learning plans and how these plans are to be implemented.

University of Warwick: Ensure that course handbooks contain sufficient and accurate information.

Appendix 3: Features of good practice and recommendations relating to the theme Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

This is an illustrative list of institutions where features of good practice and recommendations were identified in IRENI and RCHE reports. Readers are reminded that not all of these institutions specifically addressed this theme (some had opted for First Year Student Experience).

Features of good practice

Anglia Ruskin University: The effective engagement with campus-based students in quality processes and across all areas of operation.

Blackpool and The Fylde College: The extensive and valuable contribution of students to the quality assurance and enhancement activities of the College.

City University London: The proactive approach to student engagement and the effective contribution of students to quality assurance.

Gloucestershire College: The Talkback system for complaints and compliments is responsive to students and well used by them.

Institute of Cancer Research: The contribution students make to quality assurance.

Roehampton University: The collaboration between the Students' Union and the University in training student representatives, and through the Student Senate, to ensure that the student voice is supported and effectively responded to.

Royal College of Art: The effectiveness of the various mechanisms for promoting, capturing and responding to the views of students. This results in an effective relationship between the College and the student body.

Royal College of Music: The support for student representatives and the encouragement of and opportunities for student engagement in quality assurance activities.

University of Bath: The promotion of student engagement and the University's willingness to listen and respond to student views.

University of Cambridge: Student Links, the joint Cambridge University Students' Union and University initiative which brings together representatives from equality and diversity groups and provides a formal channel for the University to consult with students.

University of Exeter: The degree of student and Guild engagement in strategic, operational and resource management of the University, which is instrumental in articulating the student voice and enhancing the student learning experience.

University of Exeter: The development of the 'Students as Change Agents' project into an institution-wide scheme which promotes the role of students in proposing and delivering improvements to the student experience.

University of Keele: The extensive formal representation systems for postgraduate research students.

University of Keele: The inclusion in the University's governance structure of the Education Student Liaison Committee and Research Student Liaison Committee, providing a formal deliberative mechanism for the student voice.

Recommendations

Anglo-European College of Chiropractic: Develop comprehensive policies and procedures for promoting the effective contribution of students to quality assurance and enhancement.

City and Islington College: Support the partnership between student representatives and the college, and the implementation of the student engagement strategy through timely training.

Doncaster College: Review the approach to the involvement of students in quality assurance, including the College's Code of Practice on Student Engagement, to enable effective partnership working to take place at all levels.

Greenwich School of Management: Develop a formal system for the training and support of student representatives in order to enable them to contribute more effectively to quality assurance processes across the institution.

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine: Introduce more systematic and effective support for student representatives at all levels to enable them to understand and fulfil their duties.

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine: Ensure that the voice of research degree students in the School is heard more effectively at the institutional level.

MidKent College: Formalise systems for the election, training and ongoing support of higher education student representatives to ensure they are informed of their responsibilities and can more effectively represent their peers.

Stephenson College: Put in place policies and procedures that ensure that higher education students engage individually and collectively as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

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